

Project ACTION answers hairy questions

by Kelly Heavey

What would you say if someone boarded your bus with a bird perched on her shoulder? Don't jump to conclusions; it might be for mobility assistance. If you are unsure of how to handle service animals in your agency, or if you would just like more information, consider taking a look at Easter Seals Project ACTION's *Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals*. The eight-page Q&A guide is a resource for any agency that would like to know more about serving individuals assisted by animals.

Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals explains that the

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Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) considers a service animal to be any animal trained to provide assistance to a person with a disability. This assistance is not just for blindness; it could be for balance, mobility assistance, and more. In addition to guide dogs, this includes birds, monkeys and cats. An article in the January 2006 issue of the *Kansas Trans Reporter* entitled, "See Spot

Ride," explores this topic further.

Many topics in *Frequently asked Questions about Service Animals* cover disability policies a transportation agency must follow. For example, a driver is never allowed to ask for a service animal's

certification—because the disability of the person the animal is assisting might be difficult to discern, like epilepsy or deafness. The ADA expects every transportation employ-

ee to be trained on non-discriminatory service. If it's been awhile for some workers in your agency, *Frequently asked Questions* could help them brush up on necessary knowledge about service animals.

Sample Q&As taken from the guide

Q: "What about fear of animals or allergies?"

A: These are not valid reasons for denying service to a customer with a disability who is accompanied by a service animal. The guide suggests having a fearful passenger pay

at the front of the bus, then enter through another door. As for allergies, have the rider stay as far away as possible from the animal on the bus to avoid direct contact. If it is a smaller vehicle, consider scheduling the animal-served individual and the fearful or allergic individual at different times.

Q. "Under what circumstances can a provider refuse to transport a service animal?"

A. The only thing that can prevent a transportation provider from [transporting] that animal with the individual is if the animal is not under control of the handler or it is being disruptive or threatening to the safety of others. The guide goes on to explain that disruptive behavior can range from an overly friendly animal to an aggressive animal. It is the handler's responsibility to control the animal, not the bus driver's.

To access Easter Seals Project ACTION's *Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals*, visit www.projectaction.org/clearinghouse. You must register to have access, and registration is free. If you don't have easy internet access and need a hard copy, see page 15.

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Source:

www.projectaction.org/clearinghouse; *Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals*. Easter Seals Project Action, updated April 2007.

